



## Your Rights and Their Responsibilities

**It is important** to learn as much as you can about the organization that has contacted you for a donation.

Charitable Organizations and Commercial Fundraisers have an obligation to provide detailed information to interested donors.

Washington State law (RCW 19.09) requires that individuals or organizations raising funds for a charitable purpose **MUST:**

- ✓ State their name;
- ✓ State the name of the charitable organization and its principal place of business;
- ✓ State the name of the commercial fundraiser, if any, that employs the solicitor;
- ✓ Disclose the true nature of the organization's relationship to the government, if it is associated with, or has a name similar to a government organization;
- ✓ Upon request, state the toll free number of the Secretary of State's Charities Hotline: 1 (800) 332-4483.

An individual or organization raising funds for a charitable purpose **MUST NOT:**

- ✓ Make false, deceptive or misleading representation;
- ✓ State or imply that the contribution is tax deductible unless the charity has filed with the Secretary of State its letter from the Internal Revenue Service granting tax deductible status;
- ✓ Use the name "police", "sheriff", "fire fighter" or similar names unless authorized;
- ✓ Harass, intimidate or torment;
- ✓ Claim the tickets to an event will be donated unless the fundraiser has obtained a letter from those persons stating they will accept the tickets and the number they will accept;
- ✓ Call before 8:00 a.m. or after 9:00 p.m.

### Other Tips and Cautions

- ✓ Request written material from the organization. Legitimate organizations welcome your interest and are happy to provide information. Be wary of those that don't.
- ✓ Be wary if they offer to send a courier to collect your donation immediately.

- ✓ Don't give in to high-pressure "hardball" solicitations that demand an instant commitment. If the charity is legitimate, it should be willing to give you time to make up your mind.
- ✓ When you have decided to donate, write a check and make it payable to the charity, not the fundraiser. Do not send cash or give your credit card number to anyone.
- ✓ Don't be fooled by a name. Some organizations use sympathetic sounding names, or names that closely resemble those of respected, legitimate charities.

### Disputes

If you are involved in a dispute with a charitable organization or commercial fundraiser, contact the Washington State Attorney General, Consumer Protection at 1-800-551-4636. Complaints may also be filed online at [www.wa.gov/ago/consumer](http://www.wa.gov/ago/consumer).

## Online Resources

- Secretary of State Charities Program:  
[www.secstate.wa.gov/charities/](http://www.secstate.wa.gov/charities/)
- Office of the Attorney General, Consumer Protection:  
[www.wa.gov/ago/consumer/charity.html](http://www.wa.gov/ago/consumer/charity.html)
- Internal Revenue Service:  
[www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)
- Better Business Bureau:  
[www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org)
- Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance:  
[www.give.org/reports/index](http://www.give.org/reports/index)
- GuideStar:  
[www.guidestar.com](http://www.guidestar.com)
- AARP:  
[www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

## State Registration

The Charitable Solicitations Program registers individuals, organizations, and commercial fundraisers that solicit charitable donations from the general public. Both the benefiting charities as well as independent entities paid to solicit funds must, in most cases, provide general, financial and other valuable information about their fundraising activities. The information is available to potential donors so they may learn more about how their donation will be spent by the soliciting organization, before making a contribution.

Contact the Secretary of State's Charities Program at **1 (800) 332-4483** (Washington State residents only) local and out-of-state callers should dial **(360) 753-0863**, to verify registration status and to answer any questions you may have regarding the charitable organization or its paid solicitor. You may also send an email to [charities@secstate.wa.gov](mailto:charities@secstate.wa.gov).

To research an organization online, visit the Charities' web page at [www.secstate.wa.gov/charities](http://www.secstate.wa.gov/charities).

Registration with the Office of the Secretary of State should not be represented as an endorsement.

## Contact Information:

Secretary of State Sam Reed  
Charities Program  
801 Capitol Way South  
P.O. Box 40234  
Olympia, WA 98504-0234

Toll Free: 1 (800) 332-4483  
TDD/TTY (888) 658-1485  
Email: [charities@secstate.wa.gov](mailto:charities@secstate.wa.gov)



# Charities Give, But Give Wisely

## Protect Your Contributions

"Generosity has carried Washington State through difficult times. For each charitable donation to have the greatest impact on our friends and neighbors, we must give wisely. Asking questions and researching the charitable organization will stretch every dollar and significantly change lives."

*-Sam Reed, Washington Secretary of State*

Tax-exempt organizations are the fastest growing sector in the U.S. economy and the competition for funds has become intense. As the number of charitable organizations grows and budgets are reduced, more and more are relying on public support through donations.

While some organizations continue to utilize traditional fundraising methods, several are converting to fundraising on the Internet. Most charities are honest, reputable, and accountable to their donors. Unfortunately, some charities or their paid solicitors are not. Consumer awareness through knowledge and information is the key to combating fraud.

The Secretary of State's Office recognizes the generosity of its citizens and is committed to protecting those who give, as well as the intended recipients.



*Washington*  
**Secretary of State**  
SAM REED